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A Brief History  
of  
DOG GUIDES  
for the Blind



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NEW YORK, N. Y., 10011

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# A Brief History of DOG GUIDES FOR THE BLIND

by  
NELSON COON

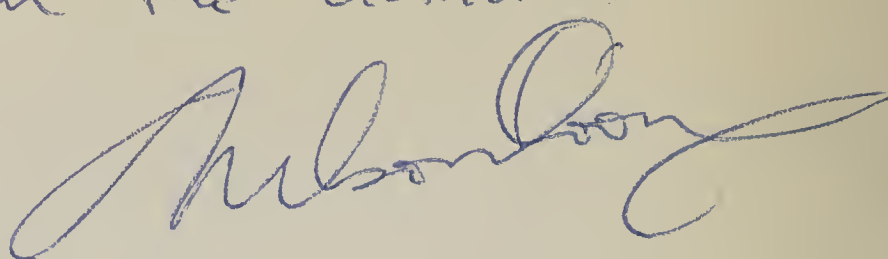
Compiled from the resources available at  
THE BLINDIANA REFERENCE LIBRARY  
PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND  
Watertown 72, Massachusetts

1959



PUBLISHED BY  
THE SEEING EYE, INC.  
Morristown, New Jersey



To Robert M Barnett  
from the author  


## Foreword

The Perkins Blindiana Library and Museum contains many treasures, most of them, perforce, hidden on shelves and enclosed drawers. The task of bringing as many of them as possible to light is a challenge which our Librarian, Mr. Nelson Coon, meets with unflagging energy.

We are privileged to cooperate with the Seeing Eye, Inc. in sharing some of our collection of material dealing with the association of blind men and keen-eyed dogs throughout the centuries.

As one whose home has been shared by a succession of Seeing Eye dogs for over twenty years, I know that this dog-and-man association can bring warmth to the heart, freedom to the body, and courage to the soul.

EDWARD J. WATERHOUSE, *Director*  
PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

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# DOG GUIDES FOR THE BLIND

## Preface

**M**AN AND DOG quite possibly became associated for the first time in activities of mutual benefit late in the Pleistocene Age, a geologic age coinciding with the Stone Age of human development. In some dark and misty forest, perhaps 20,000 years ago, some early precursor of the dog discovered that food was more easily to be had in the camps of primitive man. Man, in turn, recognized in the dog "that nice sagacity of smell," a keen sense of hearing and a speed afoot which could be used to great advantage in hunting and in guarding against attacks by larger and more dangerous beasts of prey. Our knowledge of this prehistoric association comes to us through repeated discoveries of the skeletal remains of dog-like animals in close proximity to those of man and through crude drawings on the walls of caves. The frequency with which mongrels were found in the settlements of our own American Indians and are found today in under-privileged communities also leads us to believe that the presence of a creature that always responded to a word or gesture of kindness or on which wrath could be vented also filled other important human needs.

Yes, Old Dog Tray, the friend and helper of man, has been with us in one form or another for two hundred centuries, although his less placable ancestors can be traced back many more thousands of centuries. Throughout its development as a species, the dog's ability to adapt to the needs of man is hardly less impressive than the ability of man to adapt to the requirements of his own environment.

Unquestionably reliable "prehistoric" evidence (i.e., clues to early times that are not part of written record) of the dog's adaptation to the needs of certain ingenious blind humans is presented in this unique little volume by Nelson Coon. The art forms, as he points out, represent what the artist has observed in the world about him, and Mr. Coon has found ample evidence of the association of blind men and dogs in the splendid art collection that is a part of The Blindiana Reference Library of the Perkins School for the Blind where he has been head librarian for twelve years. In addition to

prehistoric evidence, there are also presented here several very interesting written accounts of how dogs can be trained to aid the blind, including one that dates back more than a century and a half.

The Seeing Eye, Inc. marks its thirtieth year in 1959. In the time since its introduction to this country, the Seeing Eye dog leading a blind man or woman has become a familiar and always fascinating part of the American scene. Although, as Mr. Coon demonstrates, the dog guide has been known in Europe for many centuries, it has been in America, within only the past generation, that the dog guide has been employed with relative frequency. It has come to be regarded by some authorities as an effective force not only in restoring mobility to certain types of blind people but in their total rehabilitation as well.

The numerous artistic representations of the dog guide which Mr. Coon has assembled are of special interest to those who are familiar with the dog guide in America. We note, for example, the uniformly small dogs that were used in medieval times or earlier, and we recall that the German Shepherd, the basic breed used today, has been intensively developed as such in only the past sixty years or so. Moreover, employing a long leash instead of the rigid U-shaped harness, the early blind man had guidance of an uncertain variety. Man and dog do not appear to have worked practically side by side as they do today, with the dog's starts, stops and turns communicated to the blind master through the relatively short harness. We see also that invariably a long staff or cane is carried in the hand that is not occupied with the leash. This practice, still in vogue in European dog guide schools, was dropped twenty-five years ago by The Seeing Eye as inconvenient and unnecessary. It is indeed difficult to imagine the small 18th century dog guide pulling his master away from danger as can readily be accomplished by a dog in harness today, matched appropriately to the physique and temperament of his master. While human ingenuity and canine intelligence are quite evident, scientific breeding, training and care of dogs were obviously unknown.

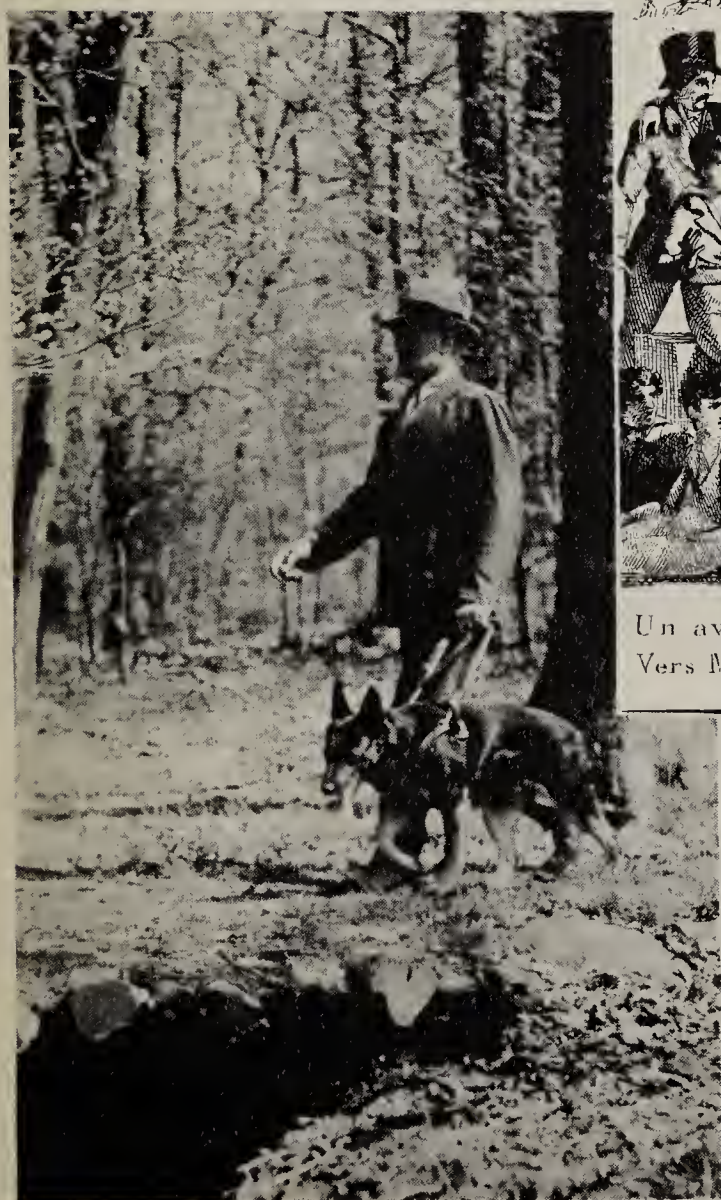
Other observations can be made, many of which Mr. Coon in his concise text does not fail to make. The principal occupation of dog guide users, as shown in Mr. Coon's illustrations, was almost without exception that of the mendicant or wandering musician.



But was not this true of the majority of blind people who ventured out of doors at all in days before enlightened rehabilitation programs were instituted; in days when bloody battles were fought for the Rights of Man, as if those rights belonged only to sighted men? With approximately one-third of today's twelve hundred Seeing Eye dogs serving blind women, we do find it strange there is no depiction of the leashed little dogs accompanying visually handi-

### YESTERDAY

French book illustration  
— 19th century



Un aveugle est Conduit par son Chien,  
Vers M<sup>r</sup>. Morville.

### TODAY

Modern guide dog with  
rigid harness



capped women. What is more, we have no way of knowing the degree of so-called travel vision possessed by the blind men who used dogs, a factor of importance today.

The accounts of dog guide training attributed to Reisinger and Birrer, as well as that of Johann Klein, are quite amazing in their understanding of many basic principles that pertain even today: The bond of affection and understanding that must exist between master and dog; the necessity of rewarding desired response to certain commands; of correcting (verbally or through a tug on the leash) undesired responses or behavior; the importance of consistency. They are all there, and they enhance our admiration of both men and dogs who learned long ago that difficulties can be overcome, if we use our heads — and our hearts. Heart, of course, is used here to refer to courage, faith, desire and to the capacity for love existing in both man and dog.

There are doubtless a number of blind people in the world today who have met with a degree of success in training their own dog guides, as did Reisinger and Birrer and others. The number of men today, however, who can say with pride that they are self-educated grows fewer and fewer as our educational facilities and the complexities of our civilization multiply. Similarly, those who want and should have dog guides have adequate facilities at their disposal. The quality of modern dog guides, educated by sighted specialists, leaves less to chance in an economy that calls for two cars in every garage and traffic jams at every corner!

The Seeing Eye is pleased to have the privilege of sharing with the Perkins School for the Blind in bringing the subject of Nelson Coon's inquiring mind and collector's eye into print for our mutual friends and others who must realize by now that there's nothing new under the sun. The indomitable spirit of man, as well as the dog's adaptability and capacity to reflect his master have, indeed, been with us for centuries. In time, most assuredly, these characteristics will be used to even greater advantage by progressive blind persons.

GEORGE WERNTZ  
*Executive Vice-President*  
THE SEEING EYE, INC.





TOBIAS *Rembrandt* (1606–1669)



# DOG GUIDES FOR THE BLIND

by NELSON COON

It has often been said that one of the best news items for the reporter is the story of "man bites dog," but since 1927 in America the dog has come to be recognized as possessing somewhat more humanitarian capacities, and the feature story often begins with "dog leads man." It was in October of 1927 that Dorothy Harrison Eustis wrote for *The Saturday Evening Post* an article describing the work she had observed in Germany of shepherd dogs being trained to lead blinded German veterans of World War I. The title of her article was "The Seeing Eye."<sup>1</sup> The story of how Mrs. Eustis brought the knowledge of the training of these dogs to this country in 1929 is now well known, and has been interestingly related in the recently published *FIRST LADY OF THE SEEING EYE*, by Morris Frank, for whom Mrs. Eustis developed a dog guide in Switzerland in 1928.

During World War I, the Germans had trained many dogs as message carriers and in other occupations, and it was not hard to find men capable and willing in the immediate post-war years to attempt the training of intelligent German Shepherd dogs to serve as guides for the blind. So quickly did this work develop, in fact, that by 1923 there was formed the organization of "guide dogs for the civilian blind." The training center for these dogs was in Potsdam, under the direction of trainers Ruecker and Wecherling. It was here that Mrs. Eustis (who herself had been breeding and training dogs for certain specialized duties with the Swiss Army) first saw the possibilities of such dogs to be trained to aid our own American blind. Responding to the challenge of Morris Frank, a blind American who had read her article in *The Saturday*

<sup>1</sup> From Proverbs, Chapter XX, Verse 12: The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.



*Evening Post*, Mrs. Eustis undertook the development of a dog guide at her place in Vevey, Switzerland. This was Buddy I, heroine of the book *FIRST LADY OF THE SEEING EYE*. Buddy was the first Seeing Eye dog to be trained by an American for use by a blind American, although blind Senator Thomas Schall of Minnesota had made use of a German-trained dog guide a year or two earlier. Today there are ten or more other dog guide centers located in the United States, each under a different name, but so strongly did Mrs. Eustis' story catch the heart of the American public, that many persons today refer to all dogs leading blind people as Seeing Eye dogs. The Seeing Eye, Inc., located at Morristown, New Jersey, is the largest school of its kind in the world, and only its products are correctly termed Seeing Eye dogs.

One might be led to think from the preceding facts that the history and training of dog guides began with the German effort following World War I. Yet it has never been clear who it was who thought of the idea and who was the first to begin systematic training. The Germans themselves, in the publicity which came out about these dogs in the early '20s, go back to the comments made in Vienna in 1819 by Father Klein, who, briefly, in his *TEXTBOOK FOR TEACHING THE BLIND*, sketches an outline for training dogs for this purpose (see my notes in *The New Outlook for the Blind*, April, 1956, pages 131-133).

His instructions translated are as follows:

Johann Wilhelm Klein in (Lehrbuch zum Unterrichte der Blinden) Vienna 1819. —

*Page 371 Chapter 33* "In an institute for the blind, dogs can also be prepared to serve as guides to such of the blind as are accustomed to walk about.

For this, the poodle and shepherd dogs are the most useful.

From the collar of the dog extends either a strap or a stick which is grasped by the left hand of the blind person, who also uses a cane in the right hand.

The rigid stick must run through a loose brace around the body of the dog, so that a side movement of the animal is fully felt in the hands of the blind person. The guiding stick is arranged with a crossbar in such a manner that it can easily be fastened to the collar of the dog; and it also has, near the top, a loop, so that the hand of the blind person will not easily lose its grip.

This use of a guiding stick has the advantage that the blind person notices at once when the dog is standing still, which is not true when he is led by a strap.

Guide dog on rigid leash,  
as recommended  
and pictured by Father Klein  
in his book. 1819



The training of the dogs, at least in the beginning, must be done by a sighted person. One leads him, many times, on the same road and drills him, particular attention being paid to places where through turning, through slow pace, through standing still, or through other movements which might be useful to the blind in situations such as the turning of the street and in the avoidance of obstacles that lie ahead — through all this the dog will be made alert to various kinds of danger situations.

Then the blind person takes the dog in hand himself and goes with him, at first on the same road with which he is already acquainted, in order to become accustomed to the movements and signals of the animal.

It is obvious that from now on the dog will be fed and cared for by the blind person himself, in order to arrive at a mutual understanding and to establish a true and faithful attachment with the leader dog.”

Reflection on these comments by Klein make one think, however, that there must have been some antecedents on which Klein based his statements, for many new ideas have a way of frequently showing up as very old ones.

It is, indeed, Alexander Mell, the great encyclopedist, to whom we owe thanks for thoughts on this subject. In his great work *ENCYKLOPADISCHES HANDBUCH DER BLINDENWESEN* (1900) he does no more than mention that there is a possibility of such a use of dogs and makes his only reference to the comments of Klein. Yet, in 1929, in the magazine *BLINDENFUHRHUND*, (Guide Dogs) he is able to discuss the matter at some length and make some deductions based on the evidences left for us by contemporary artists who found in the blind men with their dogs a subject for painting and drawing. Although Mell based his story on only a few pictures, he believed that a considerable body of evidence could be built up relating to the importance of dogs to the blind, in centuries preceding the twentieth.





MURAL PAINTING FROM POMPEII — Market scene  
blind man with dog at left  
(original in Museo Nazionale-Naples)

In attempting to follow this clue the author was fortunate in being able to utilize the resources of the great treasure of the Perkins Blindiana Collection — THE BLIND IN ART — which is composed of hundreds of originals and copies, of drawings, paintings, sculpture, etc. many of them the work of outstanding artists of the periods from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

The validity of the evidence of these many pictures relating to dogs as companions and guides for the blind, must rest upon the assumption that the artist of any time or place generally draws upon his own particular observations of the world around him, and records what he sees, making only such alterations as are demanded by artistic necessities or the desires of his patron or contract.



As archeologists pull back the curtain of ruin and time it is quite probable that more will be known than now about the universality of ideas of all kinds and it is to the excavators of Pompeii that we are indebted for the first representation of a blind man with his dog. On the wall of a house in that city which was buried in volcanic ash in the year 79 A.D. there is a painting of the "genre" type which depicts a woman and her maid in the market place being approached by what seems to be a blind man with a staff and being apparently led by a small dog, which, in the painting, is turning to his master as if asking for instructions. An actual color photograph of this mural painting may be seen on page 140 of the Skira publication of 1953 — ROMAN PAINTING. Hans Haupt - Hamburg in the May, 1958 issue of WORLD VETER-AN feels that this painting *is* authentically the first such depiction and if this is true we can assume that such a scene was uncommon in the busy world of the Roman Republic.

An even more explicit depiction of a dog used as a guide is found in the Chinese scroll painting dated in the middle of the 13th century, one copy of which is now in the METROPOLITAN MUSEUM in New York City. Here among the thousands of busy figures on a yards-long scroll is seen a blind man walking through the crowd with a dog preceding him on a tight leash in a manner to indicate prior training. The man holds the leash in his left hand, while in the right he carries a staff. This painting is entirely reminiscent of pictures of much later scenes in western art. One would hardly attempt to say from this that actual guide dogs were common in China in 1250 AD, yet neither can one neglect such visual evidence that here we have a blind man who was receiving at least a modicum of guidance from his canine friend, and, doubtless, companionship as well.

Detail from the 13th Century Chinese Scroll painting  
SPRING ON THE YELLOW RIVER. Blind man and his dog may  
be seen in center of detail.

Reproduced by courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art







In surveying the art of Japan, where, from the 10th century, much is heard about the position of the blind in society, we do not, however, find dogs so pictured with blind men. This is quite likely not unexpected, as we know that the organization of the blind into guilds meant that they mostly traveled in groups with guides and would not have needed the help of dogs anywhere nearly as much as those living in countries where the blind man may have had to shift for himself to a much greater extent. In fact in the Japanese pictures which are to be found, we find the associated dogs (and there are a number so shown) are to be seen barking at, or biting at, the heels of the blind persons. In no case is this true of blind men and dogs shown together in western art. This very disparity in circumstance contains the evidence of truth in observation and the depiction by the artist.

Turning to the West, perhaps the earliest (as well as the best) evidence we have of the use of dogs as guides to the blind are a few paragraphs written in the thirteenth century (ca. 1260) by a commentator on contemporary life, a monk — *Bartholomew*. His Latin writing was translated into Olde English by one *Trevisa* in 1398, which with modern adaptations would read something like this:

The unfortunate conditions of a blind man are so great, that it makes him not only subject to being led by a child or by a servant but also by a dog. In fact the blind man is often brought to such a circumstance that, in order to pass over and escape the perils of a bridge or a ford, he is compelled to trust to a dog more than to himself. Also in many perilous situations where men might doubt or dread to go, the blind man, because he sees no danger, is a sure guide.

From which we see how much a part of the life of the times the sight of the blind man and his dog must have been. We also note the rather low opinion monastic scholars of that time must have held for the capacity of a dog to provide efficient guidance; indeed, their 13th century concept of the "pitiable blind," with or without dogs, reflects an attitude on the part of sighted people that persists even today, in spite of the fact that a great many blind people live as independent, contributing members of society.

So we can, one believes, go now to the earliest *illustrations* of the blind as shown in Christian-influenced *western art*, to assess the use to which dogs were put by the blind men and women of the



period. One could if one wished, give credit to the legendary story of the Celtish (Germanic) blind King Odran who, 100 B.C., was alleged to have had a "Fuhrhund" (or guide dog), for so the claim is made in the German magazine of 1929 previously mentioned. But on safer ground is the evidence in a medieval painting in Nurnberg in St. Sebaldus church; showing a man on the street with a guide dog.

To Donald Hathaway of the HADLEY SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND we are indebted for the story of the too-little-known St. Herve who lived and worked in Brittany in the Sixth century, Mr. Hathaway quotes from the life of this saint by LeVicomte de Broc, how as a young man the saint-to-be went around the countryside "singing and asking for alms, with no other guide than his white dog which often lapped his feet, bleeding from the stones of the road." It is believed that a number of sculpturings in the country of Brittany depict the boy and his dog, but no photos are available for showing in these pages.

Quite possibly the earliest and most authentic European illustration is in the woodcut of 1465 showing a blind man led by a dog, which, turning, looks to his master for instruction; or at least to make certain that his beloved human cargo is safely in convoy. This has been reproduced in the book by Hampe (Leipzig 1902) *DIE FAHRENDEN LEUTE IN DER DEUTSCHEN VERGANGENZEIT*. The discussions in this and other books all point to the fact





that in the 14th and 15th centuries (at least) the intelligent blind men were largely occupied as itinerant bards traveling throughout all of Europe from village to village, retailing their stories, and using such musical abilities as they possessed in folk song, and in chanting services in the churches. For this peripatetic life they must surely have needed the dogs not only for guiding them (in such manner as simple home-training would allow) but also for protection and companionship. There is, as we shall see later, some evidence as to how such home-training was accomplished.

17th Century — Artist unknown







THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND  
Engraving after the original painting by Tintoretto (1518-1594)

Coming now to the 16th century we have two examples of art, both of them in subject matter dealing with the parable of *The Blind Leading the Blind*, from the Bible. The evidence in the Perkins Blindiana Collection shows that this subject has interested many artists, each portraying the parable in contemporary settings. In the work by Tintoretto, the dog is accompanying the master at heel, but in the English version by Nicholas Clock the dog seems to be leading. Unfortunately, master is unable to follow his little dog properly, pointing up the inadequacy of the leash in comparison with the rigid U-shaped harness used today.



THE BLIND FIDDLER  
— *Peter Johann Nip*



Details from a larger engraving done by Nicholas Clock  
of the 16th century, illustrating parables from the Bible.





Engraving ascribed to Callot  
 — 17th century

The seventeenth century was, artistically speaking, a very fertile one and the accompanying specimens include examples from some of the very famous masters of the 1600s. The drawing by Bellarge is a rather terrifying picture but it is interesting to note that the one blind beggar has had the leash of the dog well fastened to his belt, doubtlessly indicative of the value he placed on his dog.

The examples of the work of Callot, of J. Nip and Van de Venne (pages 18, 19, 20) all bear out this seeming use of the dog, of one or another breed, for purposes of *guidance* or as a kind of willing escort. The use of the omnipresent staff would indicate incomplete reliance on the dog and from this we can well assume that whatever training these dogs received was on a minimal basis, a great deal depending on the natural intellectual ability of the dog and the ingenuity of the master.





DIE ARMUT (The Outcasts) *Van de Venne* — 17th Century





After a painting by Bellange (1594–1638) Engraving by Le Blond





BEGGAR — *Rembrandt*  
(1606-1669)  
*see TOBIAS — page 7*

Most notable of the drawings of blind men and their dogs are the two examples shown from the works of Rembrandt. The one entitled TOBIAS done in 1651 is most significant and Mell in the article previously mentioned calls attention to what seems to be an obvious effort of the little dog to get his head in front of the leg of Tobias to prevent him from continuing further in the direction in which he is groping, as the dog has seen that he has missed the door itself. So we have here not only a master drawing of superb composition and craftsmanship, but also acute observation of animal intelligence. The other drawing by Rembrandt of the blind fiddler is also interesting in showing again how much a canine companion was then a part of the life of the blind.



The examples taken from the paintings of the 18th century show much the same conditions as the 17th. The Gainsborough example shows a leading dog and the one by Bigg shows the dog obviously looking to the blinded sailor for "orders."



THE BLIND MAN ON THE BRIDGE — *T. Gainsborough* (1727-1788)

But for authenticity and accurate comment on the contemporary scene in England (where animals are concerned) one can count on the careful realism of Thomas Bewick, whose woodcut illustration of birds and animals set a standard which has only been equalled by photography.

Not only does Bewick picture the blind man being led across a bridge by his dog but in his chapter on *Dogs* in *A GENERAL HISTORY OF QUADRUPEDS* (1807) in discussing the Pug dog, he makes a statement which more clearly than through other comments discovered in early literature, indicate that in England, at least, in the late 18th century, the use of dogs as guides to blind men was the usual rather than the uncommon occurrence. His discussion suggests that Pug dogs, "Lap-Dogs, Dancers, Waps, Mongrels" and other dogs of intermixed breeds, have high qualities of attachment to mankind. He then goes on to say that —

(Continued on page 26)





Fidélité.



Les chiens savans.



Le chien d'Aubry.

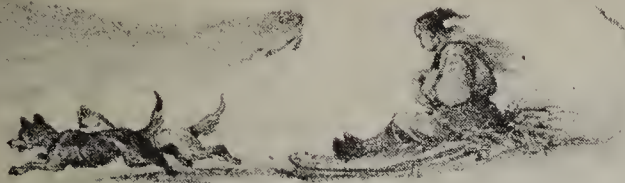


La blanchisseuse.



Vigilance.





Les chiens Esquimaux



Devouement



Aveugle



Amour maternel



La contrebande





FROM A GENERAL HISTORY OF QUADRUPEDS  
— *Thomas Bewick* —  
1st edition printed in 1790 — Newcastle

“To mention some of the more common instances of this creature’s sagacity, by way of elucidating its general character, may not be amiss; and amongst these, its care in directing the steps of the blind man is not the least worthy of notice. There are few who have not seen an unfortunate object of this description, led by his Dog, through the various passes of a populous town, to the accustomed place where he sits to supplicate the contributions of passengers. It may sometimes be seen to stop at particular houses, to receive the morsel from the hand of charity, or pick from the ground the money thrown out to relieve its miserable owner. When the day is passed, it conducts him home again; and gratefully receives, as the reward of its services, the scanty pittance which poverty and wretchedness can bestow.”

None of the names of the 19th century English artists are as well known as those of the earlier artists excepting possibly “Phiz” (H. K. Browne) who was responsible for the picture shown on page 27 and who was the illustrator of Dickens’ works.

The many examples by French artists shown on pages 30 to 35 suggest the not uncommon sight of blind people on the streets of Paris, many of whom were surely members of the community of the blind at the Royal Institute of Quinze-Vingts. These examples from 18th century France added all together, are further evidence of the frequency with which blind men and their dogs were seen together.

THE ABANDONED HOUSE by “Phiz” *H. K. Brown*  
the illustrator of Dickens’ works. Ca. 1850









Dogs, like other good things  
in which we trust,  
often lead us into trouble.

One of the interesting 19th century French pictures which fits into our story is the lithograph of the fat blind fiddler done by the artist Charlet in which we find the itinerant musician being led into the ditch by the dog, thus indicating the occasional failure of the dog guides, but at the same time showing (as we have noted in England) that the sight of dogs leading the blind was a common sight in that country. A free translation of the poetic lines displayed with the cartoon expresses, however, a distrust of man-kind as well as dog-kind.

The blind man followed his trusted dog into the deep waters. . . .

Thus man is destroyed by the so-called friends whom he trusts.

But the most notable of the pictures of the 19th century might well be the French lithograph entitled LE CHIEN in which the dog is pictured in many capacities as a friend and helper of man.

The deductions from these illustrations indicate that the association of the blind man and his dog was not a casual one in Europe but one which by the mid-19th century was accepted as being worthy of listing and illustrating.

One should note also, that not only are some of these dogs pictured as guides, but also as "assistant beggars," holding in their mouth at suitable times, the money dish. This is an accomplishment which would frequently require special training, although many dogs have learned by themselves to pick up and carry about their empty feeding pans.



THE BLIND SAILOR  
— *W. Bigg* 18th Century



THOMAS SUGDEN pictured with his dog  
Engraved by J. Parry — London 1804

*J. Parry, del.*

*A. Van Aken, sculp.*

THOMAS SUGDEN.

*London Published Dec<sup>r</sup> 28. 1804 by J. Parry, L. 10. W. 11. 1/2. 1804.*





Engraving by Dirk Langendyk  
(1748-1805) Rotterdam

*Ik zit, och arm! voor Weer en Wind,  
En zie zeer klaar, schoon zonder Oogen,  
Dat veelen meerder zyn als Blind,  
Door Onbarmhartigheid Bedroogen.*

L'AVEUGLE DE SAINT-SULPICE  
— G. Duval — 19th Century



G. Duval. — L'Aveugle de Saint-Sulpice.





LA FIN D'UNE TRISTE JOURNEE *M. Alophe* 1838





*En ce bon premier lundi de la semaine, n'oublies pas  
ce pauvre Aveugle.*

Artist unknown — Probably 18th century—French





Colored lithograph by Grenier — (1793–1867)

CONTRASTES — *C. Motte* — 19th Century





L'AVEUGLE —  
19th Century Lithograph



THE BLIND MAN OF THE BRIDGE OF ARTS 19th Century







*J. Lithog. de F. Delpeck.*

MENDIANT-  
REGNE DE LOUIS XIII  
*Delpeck (1778-1825)*





From the book *DE BLINDE* — J. Van Beers—1855  
drawing by K. F. Bombleid

LE CHIEN DE L'AVEUGLE  
19th century engraving by Dibart  
after a painting by Wafflard









An early form of "moving pictures". The round card was revolved on an axis in front of an opening. French ca. 1850



Concluding this pictorial evidence of the use of dogs as guides one can do no better than return to the comment of Alexander Mell when he points out that the evidence in the pictures is strong, for not only is the association usual but is shown when the blind are introduced as part of a larger landscape, as well as when they are alone.



Engraved by George Willie  
— Paris — 1801

Turning for a moment to our own country and a time (1843) contemporary with Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, the first director of the school, we find in the Perkins Library a book with a crude woodcut frontispiece showing a blind man with his dog and underneath this snatch from a poem—,

*The blind man by his faithful dog is led,  
From house to house to earn his daily bread;  
But not a beggar; for where music pays  
For welcome, he screws up his pipes and plays,  
Praying kind Providence to bless your store  
He humbly knocks at Light's and Fortune's door.*



The only other Early American story of the use of a dog which appears to have been trained by its owner is from a 100-page book published in Boston in 1856, in which Abram V. Courtney (one of the earliest pupils at Perkins) had this to say:

"I therefore left (the Perkins) as it appeared to me more proper to gain my living by my own industry rather than to eat the bread of charity. . . . (Although) I have at times accepted the aid that my misfortune has rendered necessary, I have never degraded myself by asking alms. . . . My faithful dog, Caper, (which I acquired in Bangor, Maine in 1851) with care leads me around corners and across streets, always apprising me of approaching danger, by pulling me back, and will not move, even though I scold him severely. His instinct is remarkable; he seems to understand what I say. If I tell him I want to go to the barber's, he leads me to the place, or he will lead me to any other place where he is in the habit of going, without difficulty or mistake; nor will he leave me for a moment, unless I tell him. . . .

Caper, the dog who for years has been the constant partner of my wanderings, is one of the most intelligent and affectionate of his race. To me he has always been a friend indeed; always patient, submissive, careful and trustworthy. He understands the misfortune of his master, and comprehends the responsibility which devolves upon him as my guide and guard. Caper claims kindred both from the Newfoundland and Spaniel breed of dogs. . . . Since then he has accompanied me in my travels through nearly all of the Northern States; and has served me in the capacity of guide, companion, body-guard and monitor. Upon one occasion, when laden with a number of heavy bundles, I sat down by the roadside for a moment's rest, and upon arising again to renew my weary march, I was surprised to find that my dog did not respond to my order to go on. He sprang upon my knees, whined, barked, and used every effort in his power to make me understand that something was wrong. I was unable to comprehend his meaning until a stranger, passing by, remarked, "Sir, you have left a bundle behind you, on the grass".

Caper is my companion, day and night. He always sleeps in the same room, and allows no one to enter during the night. . . . He is so fond of his master that he cannot bear to be separated from him. . . . During the last five years he has proved so trusty a friend, that please God, he shall never be separated from me again while we both live.

From the above one again sees the evidence that the use of the dog as a guide or escort was not unknown in America. Beggars long ago recognized not only the guiding capacity of the dog, but quite likely also the added appeal a dog made to public sentiment.





AT THE CHURCH DOOR  
Engraving after a painting by Gustave Dore  
19th century



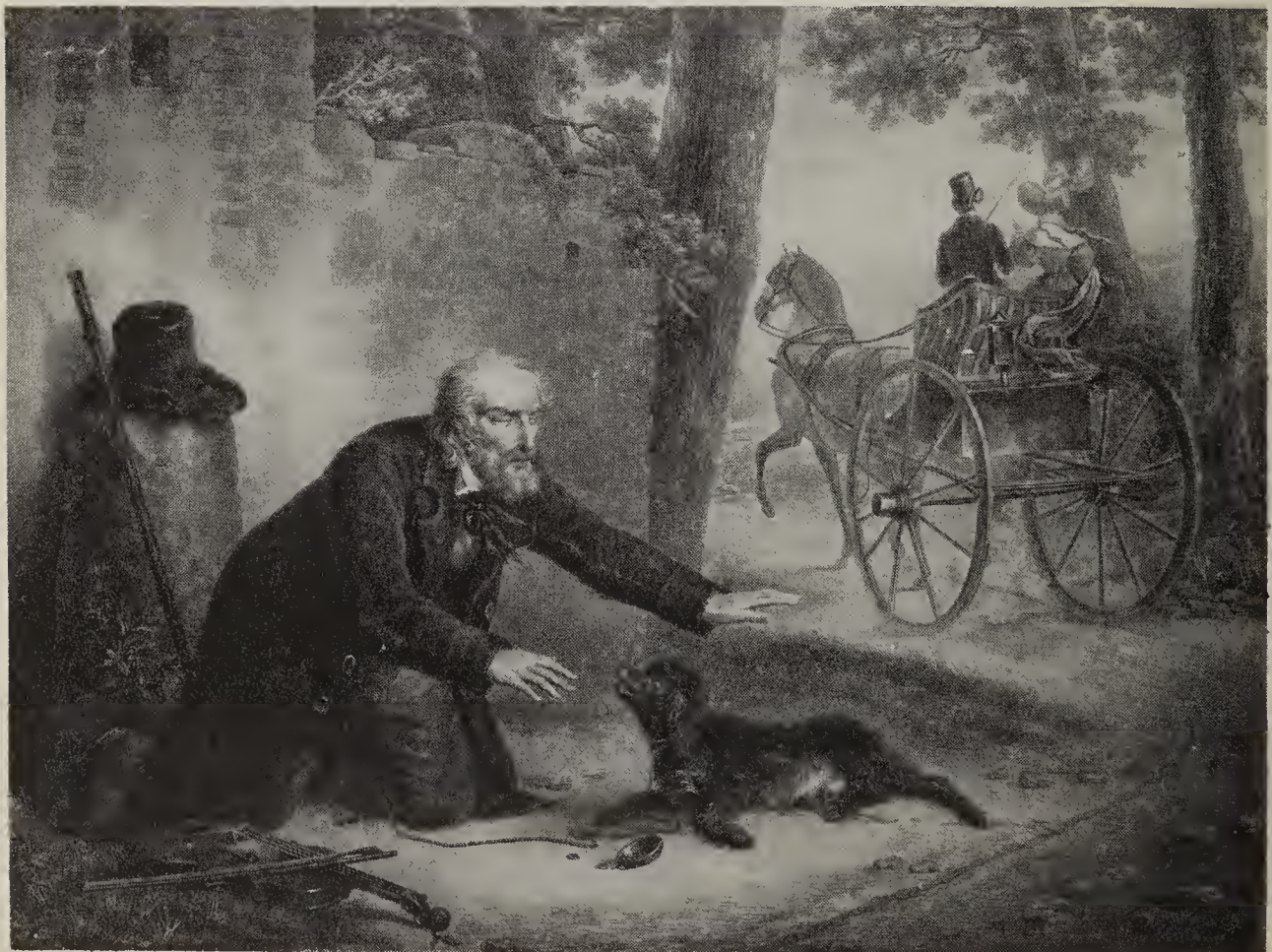
And now over and above all this *visual* representation of the association of the blind and dogs, there have recently come to light in the Perkins Blindiana Collection, several hitherto unknown articles of especial interest in which the actual training of guide dogs is presented in full detail. The first of these takes us back to the 18th century, and the second to the mid-19th century, both telling a similar story. Because parts of these stories are so detailed, they are worth repeating at length.

In the first story we have the tale of one Joseph Reisinger born (ca. 1755) in Vienna, who at the age of 17 lost his sight through an infection. Having been born of poor parents and

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N.B. Item I is part of a book published in 1827 by Doll of Vienna, the book by Leopold Chimani, entitled (in translation) *CURIOSITIES OF LANDS, STATES, AND PEOPLES OF THE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE*. Item II is a section from a book published in 1845 and is the story of his life as told to H. Nageli by Jacob Birrer who lived 1800-?. The translations have been made by Andrew Osborne of Harvard University and Miss Anna Utzinger of Switzerland, to whom thanks is due.

L'AVEUGLE ET LE TILLBURY  
After 19th Century painting by *Roehm*





having no trade that he could use as a blind man, he was reduced to systematic begging and, at first as a guide used the services of an old man, whose feebleness hampered his progress. At 25, irked by his immobility, he accepted the suggestion of a friend that he should attempt to train a dog to act as his guide.

The story at this point is very detailed as how he acquired a dog, and then through kindness and sharing his food with the dog and keeping the dog always close to him, established a basis for mutual understanding and training. By rewards or reproof he succeeded in training his guide to walk in front of him always with the leash held much in the manner of the pictures shown elsewhere in this book. The second phase of training was to teach the dog to stop instantly when spoken to and likewise to proceed. Following this he tackled the problem of sidewalks, curbs, and obstacles, and this he did within the confines of his own yard and nearby streets. The story goes on to relate how

It was a more difficult job to teach the dog to find doors and other places where the blind man wanted to stop. He solved this by getting someone to help him to take the dog to the proper doorways and when he got in front of the door he would give the signal for a quick stop and then would turn the dog towards the door to indicate his desire. The dog (a Spitz) soon learned what was wanted.

Just so in the house he trained his dog to go right or left by pulling the leash in the proper direction and also he trained him when in a house, to walk slowly and keep close to a wall, and then when the right door was reached, a pull on the leash would indicate that he wanted to go in. All of this training was given by the blind man himself, doing the training in his own house or in the house of friends. Often the man knew himself where the doors were and it was a case of training the dog to go to them as directed.

Continuing on, the story relates how these methods were pursued in the cases of stairs and landings and finally out-of-doors the training for the avoidance of bridges, ditches and obstacles.

After two months of this training Joseph Reisinger assayed to let the dog take him into the city alone and here he had his first disappointment as the dog led him into several situations where bad spills and injuries ensued. So back he went to a more careful and slow training until he was convinced that each step had been really learned. Finally he felt free to take the dog into the busiest



part of the city and always the dog would stand still at the presence of any obstacle or unusual situation until by asking or with help, the master could find a way out of the difficulty.

The training which he had given the dog was such that the dog would always take him up an entrance stairs and stand in front of a door until his master had transacted his business and it is notable that the dog was also careful never himself to go under partially lowered gates which would have bumped the master. Walking always in front of his master the dog was always alert, frequently looking back to see if everything was all right.

Shortly after this time Joseph Reisinger married, but so well did he seem to understand the necessity of the continued attachment of the dog that he never permitted his wife to act as a guide but went always with the dog in his usual position. But the life of a dog is not eternal and after 16 years of companionship, his canine companion died.

Forseeing this (and well in advance) he had secured a poodle and proceeded to train him as he had the first. He decided on a poodle as being easier to train and as one who might become more attached to the master. This second dog was very quick to learn and in fact was a much better dog than the first. Steadily but slowly he would walk in front of his master always looking backwards in order to see the lightest movement, gesture, or sign that might be given him, all the while watching for obstacles. From quite a distance he could see people putting their hands into their pockets for alms and the dog would immediately stand still to get the attention of Joseph and his master would take the proffered money.

One other instance of what the dog was able to do — They were walking on a busy street and Reisinger decided to cross the street — when from a distance came towards them a man on horseback. The dog, realizing that he could not cross swiftly enough to get his master across without being hit by the horse, the dog did what he was unaccustomed to do — howled and jumped between the feet of the blind man — so that he could not move — and thus saved his master.

This poodle was so faithful to his master that he was never distracted from his work by other dogs nor was he tempted by proffered bones but should he, doglike, be in the slightest distracted, a slight pull on the leash would bring him back to duty.

In the year 1809 this second dog after 13 years service, became ill and died suddenly. But again Reisinger had foreseen this eventuality and had in training a third dog. With his experience, and the use of a larger dog, Reisinger became a familiar sight in the busy streets of Vienna and it was said that with his guide he could thread the traffic in places where often the sighted would hesitate to go.



This third dog lived to give him 14 years of good service and when he died Joseph Reisinger then being physically unable to train and handle another dog, turned to the members of his family for the necessary travel.

The story in the book (1827) concludes by saying

This blind man is still alive and is living at Hernals, 67 where he may be talked to should any reader doubt this story. It will be seen from this that a handicapped man can overcome his difficulties if he really has the desire and if he will use the abilities which he has.

One wonders at this point if the example of this man and his success was not the inspiration for the previously mentioned comments by Father Klein of Vienna, who in 1817 updated this story somewhat by his proposals (see page 9) for a rigid harness and careful pre-training by a sighted person.

Our story now turns to Germany and the comments of Jacob Birrer, who wrote so carefully and fully about his own experiences and drew such interesting conclusions that complete quotation would seem to be in order. Although the book was published in 1845 and includes much else about the life of this blind man, evidence would suggest that these comments were made ca. 1840.



Illustration from the Birrer  
biography



Probably among all the domestic animals that serve man there is none which performs as many services as the dog; nor is there any animal as attached to man as this faithful guardian and companion. The dog excels in activity and intelligence as well as in attachment and obedience, and has such a good-natured character, that apparently he recalls only the kind deeds and not the whippings. Whatever his master orders him to do he carries out without tiring; anything entrusted to him he guards with the greatest care: if we are in danger he stands by to help us: he even avenges his master and helps to give the affronted over to deserved punishment.

Especially for the blind this animal performs most effective services: he functions excellently for those who have been robbed of their eyesight. One can say that the dog which serves as a guide to these unfortunate ones fulfills a mission which places him at the head of his kind. But for this he ought to be trained with special care and by the blind person himself.

I feel it a duty therefore to my blind colleagues who want to be guided by dogs, to give instructions, based largely on my own practical experiences, for training the dogs. Some four or five years ago I learned that in Paris (cf pictures previous pages Ed.) many a blind person has a poodle as a guide, but I could not entirely believe it. At that time I did not want a dog as a guide; but about two years ago I had the idea that I would try an experiment with a Spitz.

I did my training in the following manner:

1. I always saw to it that the dog went ahead of me while I held the leash: if he did this quite regularly I went after a while to some place well known to me in order to find out whether he kept his path faithfully.

2. If I were sure of that, I took him to a row of trees and walked up and down. If the dog led me so near a tree that I was in danger of hitting it I went on the other side of the tree and pulled the leash around the trunk until the dog felt some pain, in order to make him avoid trees, stones, etc.

3. When I was certain that he could lead me along a row of trees without my hitting them I went to an avenue where I knew there were barriers or holes in the street; and there I continued the same exercises as above with my dog. This is one of the most difficult tasks, for it is necessary to be very careful to see that the dog really goes along the avenue instead of skirting around it. Only with great patience can this goal be achieved; so if the dog has learned his lesson his teacher may well show him some favor to signalize success. This training must be repeated a number of times, and if the dog does not seem to grasp what is wanted it might be well to pull him into an obstruction and punish him so that he will submit to the will of his master; but do not beat him unless it is absolutely necessary. In like manner one can proceed in a roomy apartment.



4. Generally speaking dogs like to go outdoors and often cannot wait until the door is opened for them to leap and bound outside; but for a blind person this may cause considerable embarrassment so I did the following with my dog. I placed a bench in the outer hall but in such a manner that on one side a small opening was left to get through; then I put the leash on before I even opened the door so he would be unable to dart out. Thereupon he immediately ran under the bench which I overturned so he might believe that it was his master who had fallen on the floor. The noise frightened the animal and within a short space of time he would find the opening by means of which he could lead me outside. — This particular lesson requires frequent repetition! — In a similar fashion the dog can be made attentive to the shafts on carriages, wagons, etc.; but the blind person must know precisely where these shafts may be since they are commonly breast high. If the dog does not pay attention to the height of these objects, which is difficult for him to do, one ought to pull him up by the leash and punish him until he has an idea of what is wanted.

5. I then take him to a safe street where there are no brooks, bridges, or banks or other dangerous places. If a vehicle approached I pulled on the leash, about twenty or thirty steps before necessary, as a sign that he must evade by going either to the right or left footpath; and he learns very quickly that in such circumstances he must take the safe path. When he has accustomed himself to this sign one may take him from the known road to an unknown one and there continue the training. If, for example, I walked for half-an-hour and learned that half way two streets forked: I must give the sign sufficiently in advance so that he would not start down the wrong way. If he should retrace this route without paying attention, one turns back and repeats the signal until he understands it. One might use the same method in cities that have side streets and abutting houses.

6. If I am going into a house, the dog relaxes the leash somewhat and stands still in front of the steps until he notices that I have reached them with the help of my cane; somewhat the same is done on leaving the house. Also I try to accustom him to go directly to the doorway itself and not stand behind the doors. In the same way I then walked over small boardwalks or bridges over brooks and rivers, where likewise by relaxing the leash he gave me the sign so that I could seek out the safe place by means of my cane, whereupon the dog went very slowly in front of me until I was again on safe ground.

Just to say a word about the poodle; I am ready to admit that this is the best species for training since they can also be taught other amusing tricks; but they require a special type of training. While a spitz has staying powers even on long tours, the poodle can be used only in cities and even there is not much more than a lap dog; in addition in summer it is apt to be lazy. The poodle is very sensitive and does not react well to punishment. Also I would prefer the spitz to the poodle not only because it is stronger but also because it is more easily trained; only one must be careful to see that the animal is no more than ten or, at the most, sixteen months old, and in order to avoid embarrassments it had better be a male.



However no one should think, regardless of what species the dog is, that it can be trained only by being beaten; on the contrary, every trainer should make it his duty, when his animal has done well in his exercises, to pet him and make him a faithful friend, now and then giving him some delicacy to eat. It is only in this way that the dog will show his willingness and obedience to his master and will become attached and faithful until death.

*Yes, you my leader through my lifetime,  
You who were inseparable from me:  
You gave me comfort, consolation,  
You are life's noble ornament.  
Who'er might hate so fine a creature  
That oftentimes shames man himself,  
He ought to feel in his own person  
What real pain and shame can be.  
A noble animal should have  
Honor and human admiration.*

With the above (translated) poem Jacob Birrer concludes his instructions in training guide dogs and his tribute to his own dog, with whom he is pictured in the illustration.

The writer of these pages trusts that more reading and research will bring forth further evidences of the extent of such methods of using dogs as a guide for the blind. In the past, and based on such facilities of books and pictures as are now available it would seem that there is evidence here for belief that in the days when governments or private agencies were utterly uninterested in helping the blind in any way, that, as Joseph Reisinger said:

*"a handicapped man can overcome his difficulties if he really has the desire"*

and further, that for many centuries blind men have discovered in the dog not only a friend but a guide and helper.



9

Coon, Nelson

A brief history of dog guides for the blind.

[illegible]

**AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND**  
15 WEST 16th STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011

First Printing  
April, 1959



Copies of this monograph for sale at \$1.00 each  
The Seeing Eye, Inc., Morristown, New Jersey



